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**Ethnic Emergence and Expansion
in Central America**

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1. Introduction

While there is a tendency in Guatemala to associate the term "ethnic" with "Indian" or "indigenous," in fact, such a usage is misleading. If we seek a synonym for "ethnic," the nearest we could come would be "identity." In Guatemala, not only Mayan Indians, but ladinos, Garifunas, and gringos are ethnicities.

Cultural differences alone do not constitute ethnic differences; the former can exist without signaling or identifying the latter. Cultural differences become significant ethnically when a human population decides that they are critical to its identification and therefore must be preserved and reproduced.

For the moment, let us define an ethnic group, or *ethnicity*, as a population whose members define their collective survival in terms of replicating a shared identity, through socially defined biological reproduction.

An individual's "identity" is substantially a psychological phenomenon; it lies within the nervous system. As a consequence, one of the problems that ethnicities have (shared by those who study them) is how to identify themselves sociologically. That is, simply because members of an aggregate share an identity does not indicate where or how they will fit into a recognizable and predictable niche in a larger society. This is critical, because an individual's identity cannot have social evolutionary significance unless it is reproduced socially (i.e., unless it becomes part of the society). Hence, to be significant in social evolution, an ethnic identity has to reproduce itself; to do this, it has to find a sociological niche.

This paper examines how some of the major Central American ethnicities found their sociological niches and asks what the histories of these particular ethnicities tell us about ethnicities in general and, therefore, about their future.

The first part will review three processes through which ethnicities have come into being—by conquest, by acting as brokers between different states, and by acting as brokers within a state—and will deal with cases from various parts of Central America in order to emphasize that all peoples who are socially significant are, in fact, ethnicities. In the second part, I want to demonstrate how an understanding of the histories of these cases makes it clear that most of us are members of ethnicities, and that that membership makes us think in certain ways.

2. The Emergence of Ethnicities in Central America

If we want to understand ethnic groups, we must see them as historical events and understand their historical antecedents. The following will seek to underline the circumstances of the emergence of some of the principal ethnicities of the region. The context in all instances is that of the expanding state, and the effort is, therefore, to find consistencies in the diverse relationships that have arisen as a result.

A. Conqueror, Conquered, and Unconquered

The meeting of the Old World and the New almost immediately created one major ethnicity, the "Indian," and probably contributed to the consolidation of another, the "Spanish." The encounters, however, were spread over many centuries with the result that some quite different kinds of relations emerged.

It is convenient to distinguish three kinds of survivors of the conquest era. There were the conquerors, the Spanish and their mestizo and, occasionally, Indian associates, who retained socioeconomic dominance through continued control of military might. There were the conquered, the politically and economically subordinated indigenous peoples, who were gradually harnessed into systems of forced labor for the benefit of the colonial rulers. In this category, for general purposes, may be included the slaves brought from Africa to supplement the rapidly declining indigenous peoples. And there were the unconquered, those indigenous peoples against whom the Spanish were unable to mount effective expeditions and who effectively resisted the attempts to evangelize them. In Central America these three kinds of societies have quite distinctive geographical distributions and differ in their subsequent histories.

Almost everywhere the Spanish and their mestizo successors went, they eventually conquered. In the broad picture, the conquests, sociomilitary and cultural, coupled with the epidemics of diseases they entailed, effectively eliminated most of the indigenous population by the mid-seventeenth century. Beginning at this time, especially in areas of pre-Columbian complex societies, the conquered survived in sufficient numbers to begin to reassert themselves biologically. In Mesoamerica, where high cultures, state, and hierarchical society had allowed the growth of a very large and

well-organized pre-Columbian population, there were more survivors and they were more directly harnessed to the political-economic controls of the colonial state. There the conquered and the conquerors lived together in a tense relationship of dependency and control. There were regions of considerably greater Spanish control, such as the "core area" identified by Lutz and Lovell.¹

There are different ways to contrast the areas of dense exploited populations and those where few Indians remained and where the contemporary lowland horticultural or collecting societies have only gradually been brought within the orbit of the state. Jean Jackson, referring to Colombia, sees the difference in terms of clearly marked highland-lowland differences.² David Maybury-Lewis sees the difference in terms of whether the Indians did or did not serve as labor.³ I would suspect, however, that the question of conquest generated these other differences, although the highland-lowland difference clearly implies an ecological template.

Surely the two most important ethnicities created by the conquest were the Spanish and the Indian. It is not clear just when the term "Spaniard" became current, but it was in regular use in the eighteenth-century Mexican literature. A nationalizing identity, fairly early for Europe, seems to have developed with the appearance of peninsular people in the New World, stemming possibly in part from the sense of national mission and identity of the Castilians. It was they who felt the elite position provided by the papal concordat that granted them special control over the church. The Aragonese were explicitly excluded from the New World advantages provided to the Castilians, and other peripheral peoples, such as the Catalans and Portuguese, deeply resented their exclusion. It seems to be the case that the New World was a real catalyst for the emergence of Spanish nationhood.⁴ It is also possible that Charles V's and Phillip II's Low Country wars may have provided a further contrast between "Spain," and the emerging northern European nationalities.

The "Indian" was, of course, a totally European invention, an erroneously applied external label. While important aboriginal ethnicities were already present in Mesoamerica and the Andes, the decimation of the indigenous population made separate identities less and less convenient and significant to a Spanish king whose overriding interest was the yield in wealth and numbers of tributaries, not the diverse languages they spoke. For their part, the New World populations found no basis for common identity. The label "Indian" continues today to reflect the external definition, and now

that New World aboriginal peoples are seeking some common hemispheric identity, the term has been discarded.⁵

The Mesoamerican ethnic relations that have evolved in the subsequent four centuries have been marked by irregular, but continuing, economic and political subordination, periodic rebellions, and often terror-ridden reprisals. I am elsewhere arguing that contemporary Guatemala and El Salvador have inherited an ethnic relational system that involved a deep sense of apprehension and distrust between the two great ethnicities that compose their populations.⁶ Guatemala is currently stunned by a decade of massacres of Indians that conservative estimates set at some 50,000 deaths. At the same time, it appears that the Salvadoran Indians, possibly as many as 500,000 people, are self-defined but not generally recognized by outsiders. Salvadoran ladinos are generally satisfied that the Indians disappeared after the 1932 *matanza* (during which over 10,000 Indians were slaughtered). This is not an entirely unreasonable conclusion, since the Indians themselves realized that self-survival (and, by definition, therefore, the survival of the ethnicity) required playing down overt cultural markers and becoming ethnically clandestine.⁷ Thus the conquerors in Mesoamerica still respond violently to challenges from the population that was supposed to have been conquered four hundred years ago.

In contrast, ethnic relations are entirely different in southeastern Central America—the region east of a line running from the northern border of Guatemala and Honduras to the head of the Gulf of Nicoya in Costa Rica. The principal surviving indigenous ethnicities in this region (e.g., the Miskito, Sumu, Talamanca, Guaymí, Kuna, and Chocó) are all peoples who were never conquered. While they have been politically, and often economically, subordinated, the relationship long since established with the Spanish and their descendants has been one of negotiation and coexistence. The mestizos of Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama do not share, at least to the same extent, the latent anxiety about a potential rebellion of indigenous people that seems covertly to pervade the ladinos of Guatemala and El Salvador. The Tule rebellion in Panama in 1925 and the confrontations of 1980 to 1988 with the Miskitos in Nicaragua were handled through negotiation, not through military reprisals. Honduran relations with the Garifunas of the Atlantic coast have been basically benign and often mutually useful. In short, where conquest was not the fundamental basis of the relationship, history has been considerably less offensive, less tainted by fear and terror.

B. Interstate Brokers and Allies

The state also affects ethnic relations in ways that are not directly confrontational. It sets into motion conditions that may create a social vacuum into which an ethnicity steps to create a new role.

The colonial and republican eras found gaps in the relations between the major powers—between Spain and Great Britain and, later, between the Central American countries and the United States.⁸ Where indigenous groups had been contacted, and often displaced by Spanish colonial development, they found reason to identify separately in order to deal more effectively with the great powers. Perhaps best known because of their contemporary role are the Miskitos of Nicaragua and Honduras; the Kunas of Panama, however, also played a similar role. Although quite different in origin and in the manner of their taking on the intermediary role, the Garifunas also found an important adaptive niche between the British and the Spanish colonials.

MISKITO. The social forebears of the modern Miskitos were one of a number of major Indian societies inhabiting the Atlantic coastal region of Nicaragua and Honduras.⁹ They emerged in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents as they were becoming distinguished by their Africanization, which evidently began in mid-seventeenth century. The most common reference was to "zambos" and "miskitos," sometimes singly and sometimes running the two terms together. Apparently, from early contact, they easily incorporated strangers into the population. Blacks were arriving on the Miskito coast, possibly beginning with an early shipwreck of slaves, but more substantially from a mixture with slaves brought to the frontier enterprises established by British planters from the West Indies.

The Miskitos also early established friendly relations with the English who used the coast for victualizing their ships. They gradually became allies in the continuing conflict between the English and the Spanish. Their separate identification emerged as they became the warlike traders who enslaved their aboriginal neighbors, especially the Sumus, to provide the English with Indian chattel, and became a standing scourge to the Spanish colonists.

The Miskito identification must have taken on meaning for the Spanish over the same period as the open hostility between the two groups became ever more pronounced. The colonial Miskitos then spread both north and south in their ever more successful predatory expeditions and became a recognized ethnicity from Panama to

Belize. Their political hegemony over the region lasted well into the eighteenth century. The term "Spanish" is still applied by the Miskito to mestizo Nicaraguans.

As the British gave up their military and slaving connections with the Miskitos, and as the Spanish abandoned the Spanish *Main*, the Miskitos' aggressive hegemony was seriously weakened. A political vacuum emerged among the new republics on the isthmus and the British and French Caribbean colonies and the emerging power of the United States to the north. The English-speaking Creoles, having themselves come from the islands, had better connections with those centers. As the extraisthmian relations became more peaceful, the Creoles increasingly mediated for the British economic and commercial interests in the area, thereby displacing the more warlike Miskitos. The Creoles therefore found it necessary to differentiate themselves and to politically displace the Miskitos entirely as the Miskito kings became increasingly Creolized; they were often educated in Jamaica and returned with admiration for and dependency upon the Caribbean network. Expanding U.S. interests also found the Creole population useful and helped to marginalize the Miskitos by ridiculing them as primitive boobies who had been tricked by the British into serving as convenient allies.¹⁰

KUNA. The Kunas, similar to the Miskitos, occupied an interface between Spanish and English and succeeded, by moving from the mainland to the islands of the San Blas Archipelago, in retaining a high degree of autonomy from the Colombian state as it emerged in the nineteenth century.¹¹ This interstitial character was, perhaps, somewhat residual when it served them best, but it thrust them into the role of one of the most significant Indian ethnicities in Central America.

When Panama gained independence, early in the twentieth century, the new state tried to bring the Kunas under its sovereignty; it specifically sought to educate Kuna youth as Panamanians, to install Panamanian police in the San Blas Kuna archipelago, and to impose changes in various local customs—in short, to convert them into "modern" Panamanians. In 1925, the Kuna reacted and in a carefully staged rebellion—the Tule rebellion—calculatedly assassinated some thirty policemen, Panamanian citizens, and acculturated Indians resident on the islands. The United States still held extensive control over the affairs of the Panamanian government and evidently decided that it would be better to have a peaceful autonomous Indian population along the coast to the east of the newly constructed canal than to buttress the strength of the Panamanian state. It therefore entered as a broker and the Panamanian government negotiated a solution in which the foundation for the San Blas Comarca reservation was established.

The fact that the Panamanian state was weak militarily doubtless contributed to the solution. The U.S. role, however, while clearly self-interested, did in fact contribute to a benign solution to a potentially bloody ethnic conflict. What is particularly impressive is that since World War II, the Panamanian government has continued the relationship. Given the nature of Indian-state relations elsewhere, the conduct of the Panamanian government must be recognized as quite commendable, if atypical of the region.

In recent years the Panamanian military has been increasingly active in the archipelago, and reactive organizations have emerged among the Kuna.¹² A recent news report states that the government tried to manipulate an elder chief in contravention of the interests of younger Kuna leaders. The latter indicated their distaste by running up an American flag, and Kuna students pushed some unarmed soldiers off a patrol boat.¹³ In comparison with what one would expect the reaction to be in Guatemala or El Salvador, the tolerance of the Panamanian state continues to be remarkable.

GARIFUNA. The people known through most of the past two centuries as the "Black Caribs" came into being in the Lesser Antilles when they became differentiated from the resident Indian population, possibly through intermixture with Africans, but more likely because they were rebellious. After considerable strife, the British rounded up most of them and transhipped them to Roatan, one of the Bay Islands of Honduras, whence they rapidly spread along much of the north shore of the mainland. While surviving in the greatest numbers in Honduras, they are a very significant population in Belize and extend as far south as the central Nicaraguan coast.

The self-identity of the Black Caribs was certainly established by the time of their arrival in Honduras. What is interesting is that their interstitial role between the English and the Spanish was the reverse of that played by the Miskitos. Whereas the latter sided with the English, the Garifuna were accepted by the Spanish in Honduras because they were renowned as warriors hostile to the English and could serve as a buffer between the highland-dwelling Spanish and the English scourge along the coasts. The Black Caribs were clearly coastal dwellers and refused to be pushed into agrarian activities.

As the need for warriors declined and agrocommercial interests began to spring up along the coast, the Black Caribs found many kinds of occupations in the towns and loading docks and extended their migrating tendencies to the point of being contracted as

labor in distant places (they cut wood in Scotland during the World War II), but also in the Caribbean Islands and the United States.

"Garifuna" was taken on as an identifying label after 1950, perhaps as late as 1980.¹⁴ One explanation is that as an obviously colonialist-racist term, "Black Carib" was increasingly denigrating for a people who were visiting and taking up residence elsewhere in the world—especially in the United States, where being a "black" creates immediate problems. In any event, the new label has been accompanied by the creation of a dance group and a solidarity group, the Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras (OFRANEH), which works on community development and issues a monthly publication, *El Garífuna*.¹⁵

C. Intrastate Brokers

The cases discussed so far have been indigenous ethnicities that found their self-definition enhanced through playing roles that served the purposes of states relating themselves to other states. Interface roles, however, also exist within states where the internal evolution of a society exposes a need for articulation with no immediate candidate available to satisfy it. This seems to have been the case in the appearance of the ladinos in middle-level positions in eighteenth-century highland Guatemala, and of the Anglophone Creoles on the Atlantic coast in the same era. Today the increasing education of the indigenous population in Mesoamerica, coupled with its economic expansion, calls for political intermediaries to deal with the various arms of the state and ladino society. There is clearly an indigenous Mayan middle, or bourgeois, class emerging. While small in numbers, it is finding an important role in representing the rising national identification of the native population.

CREOLES.¹⁶ The generic meaning of the term "Creole" was a person born in the New World of European parents. Cognate terms were commonly used in Spanish and French. It emerged as an ethnic label for black Anglophone coastal peoples after Britain ceded the Atlantic coast to Spain with the treaty of 1763, and was applied to other English-speaking mixed bloods from British Antilles who joined them. In the early nineteenth century the term was used over much of the Caribbean.

The English language was a major identifying feature of this group, as was its tie with Anglo-Caribbean English antecedents. As a black, English-speaking population in the Miskito area, there was early mixture with the local Miskito Indians, although it

appears that such admixture was not necessarily so common with other Indian populations. As was suggested above, their separate ethnic identity began to emerge in the late eighteenth century as a response to the political vacuum and the decline of Miskito power after the departure of British interests.

As the nineteenth century evolved, the warrior role that had endowed the Miskitos with political superiority gradually lost its salience. The U.S. interests that took up where the British left off brought with them cultural doubts about "primitive" Indians and preferred contact with the English-speaking Creoles. The Creoles enjoyed a superior status on the coast only for a limited period, however. With the growth and expansion of the inland mestizo population in the twentieth century, and the claims being made by the Managua government, their relative dominance was gradually displaced by that of the mestizos. This was exacerbated with the triumph of the revolution in 1979, when the incoming Sandinista government further marginalized them in favor of mestizos.¹⁷ The Creole ethnicity clearly retains strong identification with other black anglophone peoples of the Caribbean, and today they confront the problem of potentially greater integration into Nicaragua.

LADINO. The colonial period was one of continuing mestizoization, but the records are immensely ambiguous as to how the emerging varieties of people were to be classified. The cumbersome colonial racial categories alluded to earlier had relatively little socioethnic reality. In Spanish American those with constancy were, in general, (1) "Indian," (2) "Spanish," "peninsular" and/or "white," and (3) "mestizo" and/or "ladino," and so on. While the term *criollo* was common until the nineteenth century, it declined thereafter, and remains in use today mainly with groups that have African antecedents.

Finer local and regional classifications yielded local discrimination, but did not result in the emergence of a widespread ethnicity that was distinct from Indians and whites. Indeed, the mestizo's goal was often to be identified and marry as a white; and for urbane, peninsular officials it was easier to crudely bunch "ladinos e indios" than to discriminate between them.

The emergence of the nineteenth-century coffee export economy had different regional effects. Guatemala and El Salvador both became deeply involved, but the effect was devastating in El Salvador, where the Indian land base was more severely attacked than in Guatemala. In Guatemala, it was easier to trap Indians into a forced labor system, and the Reform governments of the 1870s explicitly set out to control and

channel Indian labor into export production. Carol Smith argues that the ladinos emerged as a separate class, since they were distinguished from the Indians, that is, as those who were to be harnessed by forced labor laws, debt peonage, and later vagrancy laws.¹⁸ They came into the western coffee area, principally from the *oriente*, to take over the growing town commerce and to assume managerial positions in the coffee farms. They became the intermediaries between the class of controlled labor and the class of urban and cosmopolitan landowners and exporters. They were the conforming citizens of the state. While Smith is probably right that the coffee era vastly enhanced the class definition of the ladinos, they were already being recognized as an emerging middle urban class by the 1860s.¹⁹

This specialized class sense for the term "ladino" in the western highlands did not displace the more general usage of the term over the country as a whole. As such, both the nature of the ladino society and ladino-Indian relations do vary, sometimes profoundly, from one region to another, and the regional differences are at issue in some of the major ethnic problems of the area. Ghidinelli asserts that on the Atlantic coast of Honduras and Guatemala the ladinos do not so clearly self-identify. Ladinos of the Honduran coast explicitly use the term "ladino" to refer to people of Indian-white mixture, among which they count themselves, but with no sense of ethnic identity. Ghidinelli asserts that they generally feel that it is better to be able to identify with European extraction.²⁰

MAYAN BOURGEOIS. In Guatemala indigenous peoples account for a very large portion of the total population. Beginning with the Revolution of 1944, this population has been increasingly, if irregularly, active within the scope of national political, religious, and economic activity. There is emerging a clearly distinct, if still small in numbers, Indian bourgeoisie that has generally completed secondary school, and a significant number of whom have taken university studies. There are lawyers, doctors, bureaucrats, and teachers, both at the secondary and university levels, although, obviously, principally the former.

Unlike the Guatemalan highland ladinos and the Creoles of the Atlantic coast, the Mayan bourgeoisie is creating a space for political action that has become inevitable, given the level of education available. With their basic support (if hardly luxurious) provided for by their professional work, some of these individuals have chosen actively to better the general political position and social welfare of the indigenous population. Under the Ríos Montt government, Indians were brought into the council of state, and

under the current elected regime, there are two Indian deputies in Congress. While it is generally recognized that these roles are more symbolic than functionally representative of indigenous interests, the current deputies are nevertheless active in congressional committees working to help their ethnic compatriots.

The emergence of indigenous identification at the national level has to be seen as one of the major ethnic events in the entire Central American region. In contrast with El Salvador, where the comparable population has found it necessary to exist in some obscurity for the past half century, the Indians of Guatemala have not hidden their ethnicity, and their current national emergence can only suggest the growing importance that Indians will have in national affairs in the years to come. While the government was able to snuff out serious Indian participation in the revolutionary activity of the guerrilla groups active in the countryside (1979–1985), it is interesting that the broad mass of the indigenous population gives no evidence of following the Salvadoran example of giving up indigenous identification and the cultural practices that accompany it.

Since there is little evidence that the basic ladino philosophy concerning the "*indio*" has changed—that natives need to be controlled, to be educated to give up their divergent cultural ways, and to conform to ladino-defined norms and conduct—there is still an immense gulf in understanding of the basic principles of ethnicities. Nevertheless, the national-level operations indicate that the day is approaching when there will be enough native peoples at the national level that they may change things in their favor.²¹

The new national bourgeoisie is, therefore, increasingly playing a critical brokerage role between the national ladino leaders and the larger mass of Indian peasantry, townspeople, and laborers. It is filling the space that is opening up for indigenous leadership and, at the same time, it represents a national-level viewpoint that is sophisticated in terms of the history of the indigenous population and its role in Guatemalan history.

3. Ethnic Dynamics

Let us now step back a moment and look again at the definition of "ethnicity."

An ethnicity is any population whose members define their collective survival in terms of replicating a shared identity, through socially defined cultural and biological reproduction.

This definition implies a great deal, and we have time here only to touch on two major areas: the importance of identity and of power.

A. Identity

Ethnicities differentiate themselves by reproducing characteristics that mark them as distinct. The features that give the group its identity are seldom entirely knowable. There are all sorts of subtle behaviors, some almost subliminal, that let you know when you are dealing with a person of your own ethnicity. While some features will be made overt and explicit, others will be concealed by the members. There will also be some that are ambiguous and may be drawn upon or not, depending on the circumstances.

Overt features are of many kinds, but most commonly they will include one or more of the following: (1) a claim to an area of the earth's surface—land or water—or to a critical resource thereon; (2) a language or dialect; (3) somatic features; (4) a specific ideologically defined social relationship, such as a religious or political organization; and (5) almost always a myth of common origin.

The physical nature of the feature has important consequences for both the physical survival of the group's members and their ability to retain their ethnic separateness and identity.²² Perhaps most critical for both are the retention of resources and language. Certainly the most critical problem that European expansion pressed on the indigenous populations of Central America (as well as on those of the rest of the world) has been the loss of their lands. A great many romantic pages have been written concerning the identification of the Indian with the land, and certainly a great deal of it has been true.

Less has been said concerning language, but today one of the ongoing problems confronted by the nationally oriented Indian activists is the retention and continuation of the Indian language. For the Mayan-language speakers this has presented serious problems, since there are both dialectical and language differences about which final decisions cannot be readily made.

Sometimes the language issue presents contradictory problems. The Anglophone Creole population of Nicaragua is divided as to whether it wants its dialect of English to be taught in the schools. Some feel that it is an unfortunate, low-status dialect, and that their children would benefit by being taught standard English; others feel that the local language marks an ethnic difference that should be perpetuated.²³

Much is made of somatic features by North Americans, and they are certainly visible in Central America. However, the fact of racial mixture has attenuated severely the identifying potential of skin color. Since it cannot identify categorically, skin color is basically ambiguous and is used varyingly. Even though many Guatemalan highlands indigenes do not manifest the classic "Mayan features" characteristic of the prehistoric representations in the northern lowlands, most would be recognized as ladino were they simply to change their identity. By the same token, many ladinos would readily be taken for indigenes were they to take on the appropriate customs.

Perhaps the most important role that somatic features play in the ethnic system is that, wherever people do place some emphasis on them, they influence preferences for marital partners. This emphasis is, however, far from universal. The Miskitos are little concerned, whereas the Guatemalan upper class and the North Honduras ladinos are more concerned. Since so many ladinos are somatically indistinguishable from indigenes, the latter could be fooled were they to depend on somatic traits as a guide.

Social relationships are, of course, the principal locus of ethnic identity. To be a "*natural*" in Guatemala is to belong to a particular family, a particular village, a particular set of religious organizations, and so on. To be a ladino is similarly to belong to a series of relational systems that are not usually to be confused with those of the indigenous population. All symbolic features exist, necessarily, in a network of common understandings that also define a social relational network.

For longstanding ethnicities, such as the indigenous people of Guatemala, the origin stories are told and retold. However, there is little question that the growing interest manifested by educated indigenes in the traditional literary forms, such as the *Popol Vuh*, marks a serious new effort to strengthen interest in the younger generation. Little attention has been paid to the "origin myths" of the ladinos, but they merit serious attention.

One of the interesting features of ladinos is that they generally recognize that they have some Indian genetic ancestry, but, at the same time, many prefer to reject the notion that they have any Indian cultural heritage. The open ambiguity in this situation

suggests that a good deal more attention needs to be paid to the question of the problem of the ladino's identity. While there are some sophisticates who see no reason to deny indigenous cultural and biological heritage, there are others who prefer to hide, even deny, it.

There is another aspect of the definition of what constitutes ethnic identity and membership that has been the source of a great deal of misunderstanding. The problem lies in the fact that all ethnicities have at least two distinct definitions. At the very minimum, ethnicities can be and are identified by the members themselves (i.e., internally defined identification) and by outsiders (i.e., externally defined identification).

There are, moreover, major differences between internal and external definitions, and profound consequences deriving therefrom. Outsiders will choose criteria and definitions that will best meet their interests. Thus, when the Spanish decided to define the aboriginal population as human beings who could be evangelized, it enabled them to be more easily harnessed as labor under the peaceful control of the church. External definitions are likely to impose constraints or controls; they will set different conditions for the reproduction of the group than will internal definition. The most exaggerated case can be seen in the handling of slaves. The outsider's origin myth for the group will inevitably differ profoundly from the insider's.

In contrast, insiders' definitions will select features that are presumed to be advantageous to the members; crucial identifying features, appropriate attendant cultural markers, and rules about reproduction are defined in terms of how the members see their own self-interest to be best advanced. Similarly, the dynamics of social reproduction are then defined and directed by the operators, and not by others.

Certainly, some major problems in understanding the definitions of both "*indio*" and "*ladino*" hinge on the question of who makes the definition. The term "*indio*" is used in many ways, often to refer to people with any degree of darkness of skin, and sometime only to those who speak an Indian language. The people being so labeled could not conceivably keep track of these variable usages and tend not to use the term at all.

To some Indians, it may be convenient to classify all non-Indians as ladino; some of these people, however, do not so classify themselves. Indeed, the ladinos of northern Honduras studied by Ghidinelli presented the problem clearly.²⁴ The "origin myth" makes it clear that they are descendants of Indians and Europeans, and perhaps Africans, but their reproductive preference is with whites.

Historically, an outsiders' definition has often categorized a collectivity that only later adopts that definition itself. Early colonial "discovery" and ethnographic research were replete with cases in which a population had one name for itself, specifically referent to some identifiable set of people, and the western observer had another, referring to some assemblage that was either more or less inclusive. Thus the term "*indio*" of the colonial era had no meaningful referent for the aboriginal peoples. Surely no one living on the eighteenth-century Atlantic coast called himself or herself a "zambo-miskito." There are today North Americans who are loath to call themselves "gringos," and non-Indian Guatemalans who regard the term "*ladino*" as denigrating. "*Garifuna*" has been substituted for "Black Carib," a term that was a misnomer from the outset. Although it took 450 years, the externally applied, universalistic definition of "Indian" (if not the term itself) established by the Spanish is now increasingly being used as an internal definition by the Mayan bourgeois members of the population. The fact that what the Spanish called the "Indian" population is now collectively taking on its own name is an expression of its own new view of its power.

B. Collective Survival: Politics and the State

Ethnicities that emerge in states are eminently political—that is, they are strategies of social survival.²⁵ They are a response to the question of who shall survive and who shall exercise domination, hegemony, and autonomy in a field of possible contenders.²⁶ The colonial period of mercantile and industrial state expansion extinguished or subordinated native and customary practices of peoples in the name, first, of "progress," and, later, of "development." In contrast today, especially in ethnocratic states, native and ethnic identifications are a growing source of both individual security and social action.

In Central America, terms for socially fragmented aggregates, such as "Pocomam" or "Quiché," are now used as labels for political movements; terms that were little known outside the groups themselves, such as "*Garifuna*," are now asserted to be the correct label for the group in question. For these emerging identity groups, the state is more often seen to be an obstacle to self-development and to achieving a better life. While it is possible for people to live in communities where there has been little opportunity or need for an ethnicity to take form, in contemporary complex societies it is

common for everyone, in fact, to identify with some ethnicity beyond their immediate ancestry.

Ethnicities are, then, an expression of solidarity, or of individual identification with a larger inherited whole, that becomes explicitly recognized and active when threatened by the state or by processes set in motion by state actions.²⁷ It is almost inevitable, therefore, that ethnic relationships will, from time to time, be characterized by conflict and contentiousness,²⁸ particularly when used to seek revindication and social survival or advancement of their members. They then spawn social movements and sometimes militancy. Indeed, the only alternative to increasing solidarity is fragmentation. In earlier, preagricultural eras, and when the natural environment was less crowded, it was normal for societies periodically to break-up, and many did so seasonally. With the crowding of the world, however, the fragmented society is likely to find its resources expropriated by others and to be unable to recompose itself.

In so-called ethnocracies,²⁹ it is not uncommon for the dominant ethnic group to claim a kind of nonethnic universality to its own condition and ascribe ethnicity only to subordinate groups. To ascribe the term solely to some portion of humanity (e.g., to hold that "Indians" are an ethnicity but that "whites" or "ladinos" are not) places the discourse in an overtly partisan political context, implying that one is superior to the other.

The potential for ethnic action within the state is a question of power, which, in turn, depends on force and control over resources. In Guatemala the basic equation was established by the conquest, and future generations have been remolded in a procrustean form established four hundred years ago. Anyone today who is an Indian is subjected to endless experiences to remind him or her that the relative status of the indigenous population is still by and large prejudiced and subordinated.

While the conquest established who was at the top and who at the bottom, it did not establish what might happen between. Clearly, an association with the conquerors gave advantages, and one with the Indians was disadvantageous. Thus, in the colonial and early nineteenth-century literature the terms "indio-ladino" and "ladino-Español" imply that the intermediate populations in question are being prejudiced in one direction or the other direction. The picture did not begin to clarify until the appearance of the growing export economy provided an opening in the power structure into which some members of this amorphous and poorly defined "ladino" population could find a

footing. The history of the Miskitos and Creoles on the Atlantic coast presents obvious parallels.

The power implications of imposing names and definitions are manifest in lesser cases as well as greater. On the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, which the Spanish never conquered, the indigenous population externally labeled Europeans "Españosles," a usage that the Nicaraguans have not been able to change in over a hundred years of independence from Spain.

4. The Future of Ethnic Expansion

While the discussion has been perhaps a little rambling, there are some implications to be noted from the material we have covered.

A. There is little question that the indigenous population of Guatemala is the most significant on the isthmus. In the late eighteenth century there were some 524,000 Indians in Central America and Panama, and some 53 percent of them lived in Guatemala; today, the figure has risen to 78 percent.

There is a great discrepancy between the estimates of the size of this twentieth-century population. Proindigenous advocates have claimed that as much as 85 percent of the population is "Indian," and they would surely be right if everyone with an indigenous ancestor were included; if, however, we are referring to people who identify as members of an indigenous ethnicity, then the figure could not hold.

Census Year	Total Population	Indian Population	Percent Indian
1950	2,788,122	1,491,725	53.5
1964	4,245,176	1,842,802	43.3
1981	6,054,227	2,536,523	41.9

The censuses give some figures that suggest a decelerating decline in the total population. While the basis of census judgments is notorious, nevertheless, I suspect that their figures are closer to some kind of social truth than claims based on ancestry. What is of much greater importance, however, is that four of the five departments with

the highest percentage of Indian population manifested an increase in the the proportion of Indians over the last intercensus period. This means that in the western highlands there is a core area where the Indian population is becoming stronger. It seems likely that the northern part of Quetzaltenango and San Marcos and southern Huehuetenango are part of this area, were it possible to separate the figures for those areas. It is here that Carol Smith locates her commercial core of Indian development, and in two of these departments (El Quiché and Chimaltenango) the greatest loss of Indian life was sustained in the 1979–1984 period.

Department	1950	1950	1964	1964	1981	1981
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
	Pop.	Indian	Pop.	Indian	Pop.	Indian
Totonicapan	99,434	96.6	142,873	94.2	204,419	97.1
Sololá	82,869	93.8	107,429	93.1	154,249	94.2
Alta Verapaz	188,758	93.4	263,160	92.0	322,008	89.4
El Quiché	174,882	83.7	255,280	84.9	328,175	85.2
Chimaltenango	122,310	77.5	161,760	76.1	230,059	79.8

While in the overall picture there may be a slow decline in the Indian proportion of the national population, it is quite overbalanced by two facts: the rate of decline is decreasing and may level off; and the rate of absolute growth is accelerating markedly.

Intercensus Interval	<u>1950–1964 (14 yrs)</u>	<u>1964–1981 (17 yrs)</u>
Change in Indian		
percent of total	53.5 to 43.3 (10.2 pts)	43.3 to 41.9 (1.4 pts)
Percent increase	27	73
in absolute numbers		

Of course, population size is not in itself enough to determine the direction of the political process. Certainly of equal significance is the fact that the Indian population is increasingly politicized. Two kinds of processes are relevant here: (1) the fact that the periods of democratic government—be they ever so brief—have allowed Indians increasing participation; the 1944–1954 era and the current period have been immensely important; (2) the fact that the ladino ethnocracy readily resorts to terror to defend itself; the massacres at Patzicia, Panzos, and the holocaust of the early 1980s have not been forgotten by either party.

B. The scope of the definition of the indigenous membership is creating a number of new, perhaps competing, ethnic definitions. When Sol Tax was doing research in Guatemala in the 1930s and 1940s he proposed that the principal unit of Indian culture was the *municipio*. He contested the claims of European ethnographers that there was any significant larger or more inclusive entity such as tribe or nation. Today Tax's claim would be seriously challenged, not, however, because he was wrong, but because times have changed. Many Indians in the early 1950s found their primary identification with the *municipio*; employees of the Instituto Indigenista know the difference between Quiché and Cakchiquel, but the terms were not widely used in all the villages. Nor was there any general recognition of identification with all the indigenous people of the country, nation, or region.

Today the importance of the *municipio* identification is surely changing, but we have no real knowledge of what is happening there. What is clear is that many Indians are also finding identity with a larger entity labeled in linguistic terms—Quiché, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, Man, Kanjobal, and so on. Equally important is that the Mayan bourgeoisie is clearly identifying at the national level; possibly for the first time since the conquest there is a pan-Indian identity. Moreover, this identity is extended by some to include indigenous peoples of other countries.

There is no question that much of this is experimental; that is, identifications are proposed and, whether intentionally or not, are sent abroad as trial balloons. If we remember that the ethnicity is a political effort, then it is logical that there should be various attempts in different forms to find one that will offer individuals security, the basic reason for their existence.

C. The search for security is not limited to experiments with forming indigenous ethnicities. While space precludes any serious treatment here, it is important to place the ethnic process within the larger context and to recognize that there are others that are much more visible and active at the moment. These include some that were introduced during the revolutionary era of 1944–1954 (i.e., political parties, campesino organizations, labor unions, and the Acción Católica). Clearly the most successful efforts in recent years have been the new organizational forms offered by the diverse Protestant groups. Their rather phenomenal increase in the past decade was unpredicted by any except their own visionaries.

D. Some ethnicities are so small that any serious attempt to keep them a viable identity is extremely difficult, and one must ask whether it is more an act of artificial museumship than of a workable survival organization. That is, if ethnicities are survival vehicles to help people, then one must at least wonder about an ethnicity that is costly for people to keep viable. Somehow, the original purpose has been lost; instead of being a device to help people to survive, it now requires special efforts to keep itself alive. The Ramas of Nicaragua are a case in point. It is not that the Ramas are making a major effort to retain their ethnicity; rather, the Nicaraguan government is making the special effort through hiring linguists to help rekindle interest in the language and to create a greater identity among the surviving three hundred or four hundred people.

In contrast, Nancie Gonzalez argues that the Garifunas are an ethnicity that is effectively disintegrating because they are abandoning their native territory along the Caribbean Coast from Nicaragua to Belize. She notes that they have not, since their arrival in the late eighteenth century, had much of a political structure above that of kin organization. While she allows that some Garifunas are manifesting a militant nativistic rhetoric, there is little future for the Garifunas "as a living *sociocultural* entity." There are efforts at a revival of Garifuna identity, but it may be as important in advancing individual careers in the larger society of the United States or Honduras or Belize,³⁰ as it is aimed at the consolidation of Garifuna society.

NOTES

1. Christopher Lutz and George Lovell, "Core and Periphery in Colonial Guatemala," prepared for a symposium on Indian Communities and the State in Guatemala, Latin American Studies Association, New Orleans, March 17, 1988.
2. Jean E. Jackson, "Being and Becoming an Indian Vaupes," *ibid.*
3. David Maybury-Lewis, "Becoming Indian in Lowland South America," *ibid.*
4. I am not well versed enough in Spanish and colonial history to make assertions here. The ideas expressed herein derive from a helpful conversation with Karl Butzer
5. In English, "Native American" is favored.
6. R. N. Adams, "The Conquest Tradition of Mesoamerica," manuscript in preparation.
7. Materials on this are related in Theodore Macdonald, "El Salvador's Indians," pp. 14–16, and Judith M. Maxwell, "Nahual-Pipil: 'Muy Político,'" pp. 17–18, both in *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1982.
8. It could be argued that an overt effort to use this kind of process as a strategy was the creation of the "Contras" by the United States in the 1980s.
9. Charles Hale, "Inter-Ethnic Relations and Class Structure in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast: An Historical Overview," in *Ethnic Groups and the Nation State*, edited by CIDCA/Development Study Unit, University of Stockholm, Department of Anthropology, 1987; Jean Preston, "The Mosquito Indians and Anglo-Spanish Rivalry in Central America, 1630–1821," *Latin American Studies, Occasional Paper No. 48-1987*, University of Glasgow.
10. Michael D. Olien, "E. G. Squier and the Miskito: Anthropological Scholarship and Political Propaganda," *Ethnohistory* Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 111–133.
11. James Howe, *The Kuna Gathering*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp. 9–11.
12. The *Movimiento de la Juventud Kuna*, has issued a mimeographed pamphlet entitled, "Rebelde," objecting to military actions within the San Blas Kuna Comarca.
13. *New York Times*, April 25, 1988, p. 4.
14. A cursory review of the obvious sources does not reveal when or under what particular circumstances the term "Garifuna" was adopted.
15. Zulema de Corrales, "Relaciones interétnicas en la región de la Moskitia: El Caso Miskito-Sumo," in *Costa Atlántica de Centroamericana*, compiladores David A. Smith W. y Carmen Murillo Ch. San José: CSUCA, 1983, pp. 31–36.
16. Charles Hale, "Inter-Ethnic Relations and Class Structure in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast: An Historical Overview," in *Ethnic Groups and the Nation State*, edited by CIDCA/Development Study Unit, University of Stockholm, Department of Anthropology, 1987, pp. 39–43.
17. Edmund Gordon, "Afro-Caribbean Nicaraguans: Creoles and the Sandinista Revolution," unpublished manuscript, March 1988.
18. Carol Smith, "Causes and Consequences of Central-Place Types in Western Guatemala," in Carol Smith, ed., *Regional Analysis, Vol. 1, Economic Systems*. New York: Academic Press, 1976, pp. 255–302.
19. Casal Pio [Enrique Palacios], *Reseña de la situación general de Guatemala 1863*. Edición, introducción y notas por Jorge Luján Muñoz. Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala. Guatemala: Serviprensa Centroamericana, 1981, p. 51.
20. Azzo Ghidinelli, "Los grupos humanos que se originaron después de la conquista en la Costa Atlántica de Guatemala y Honduras," in *Costa Atlántica de Centroamericana*, compiladores David A. Smith W. y Carmen Murillo Ch. San José: CSUCA, 1983, pp. 10–30; "Mientras en Guatemala existe conciencia de ser ladinos, en contraposición a los indios y a los morenos, en Honduras falta autoidentificación," p. 19.

21. This is stated with clear recognition that in the past, the approach of the Indian peoples to actual national action has been met by ladino-, or government-sponsored, slaughters.

22. However, since they are symbols, the formal characteristics of these special features may well exist independently of their association with a particular ethnicity. Jews are not the only people who may speak Hebrew or Yiddish; and Indians are not the only people who may use communal lands. The formal, overt, features of an ethnically identified cultural trait may be passed on independently of the ethnic population that uses it as an identifying characteristic. Formal traits can and often do survive in culturally separate contexts, distant in time and space, from an ethnicity that identifies with them. Similarly, the ethnic traits associated with an ethnicity can and do change over time.

23. Unfortunately, the academic U.S. university linguists who are advising on the matter are themselves divided over the problem.

24. Ghidinelli, "Los grupos," 1983.

25. I.e., this is not used in the folk sense of "political party" or "political action."

26. In nonstate societies, these questions usually hinge on ecological conditions and personal disputes.

27. The proposition that groups solidify in response to problems of social power is hardly new. Morton Fried argued that what travelers and anthropologists called "tribes" were, in fact, social entities that came into being on the frontiers of expanding western conquering and colonizing states. (Morton Fried, "On the Concepts of 'Tribe' and 'Tribal Society'," in June Helm, ed., *Essays on the Problem of Tribe*, Proceedings of the 1967 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968, pp.3-22; this process is also described as an inherent part of the coordinate-centralizing paradigm in Adams, 1975.)

28. Jorge Solares phrases this political character by asserting that to be "ethnic" is to assert the presence of a specific *social relational conflict* (oral commentary in FLACSO conference, Guatemala, July 1988). I would agree in the broad sense, but would caution that the term "conflict" need not refer only to active contests of force.

29. Barsh (1987, p. 6) ascribed coining of this term to Rodolfo Stavenhagen.

30. Nancie L. Gonzalez, *Sojourners of the Caribbean, Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garifuna*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 213-214.